

## **The Star-Ledger: 113 chemical plants (7 in N.J.) deemed deadliest if attacked**

By Robert Cohen and J. Scott Orr

WASHINGTON — Terrorists could kill more than a million people through an attack on any of seven New Jersey chemical plants, according to a new congressional study that found deadly threats from lax security in general at chemical facilities across the country.

According to the study by the Congressional Research Service, worst-case attacks on any of 113 plants in 23 states would result in 1 million or more deaths. Twenty- nine of the plants are in Texas.

"The report shows that this is not just a problem along the New Jersey Turnpike," said Andy Igrejas of the National Environmental Trust, a nonpartisan watchdog group. "There are plants that put hundreds of thousands — even mil lions — of people at risk in the Deep South, Midwest and Western states as well."

Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.), who requested the report and released it yesterday, urged federal action to tighten security at America's chemical plants.

"The Bush administration needs to understand that the threat is not theoretical. There are nightclubs in New York City that are harder to get into than some of our chemical plants," Markey said.

The report was based on statistics from the Environmental Protection Agency that are used to assess the threats posed by accidental release of chemical stockpiles. Neither the report nor the EPA data identified which plants pose the biggest risks.

According to the report, Texas has 29 major targets, the most of any state, where attacks would result in 1 million or more deaths. California and Illinois have 13 each; Ohio has eight; and New Jersey and Florida have seven each.

The report also shows New Jersey has as many as seven other plants that, in a worst-case attack, would lead to between 100,000 and 999,999 deaths, plus 20 plants that would cause 10,000 to 99,999 deaths, 20 others that would cause 1,000 to 9,999 deaths, and 46 that would cause 999 deaths or fewer.

Terrorism experts have described the stretch of northern New Jersey between Newark Liberty International Airport and Port Elizabeth as the most dangerous two miles in America because of its concentration of people, chemical plants, oil storage tanks, refineries, pipelines, highways, rail links, and port complexes.

After several years of resistance, the Bush administration reversed course last month and said it sup ports regulating chemical facilities that might be terrorist targets. The administration previously had favored industry self-regulation.

Robert Stephan, an assistant secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, told a Senate committee that voluntary safety measures taken by some of the largest chemical companies have been insufficient to safeguard communities. He said the administration is "assessing the need for a carefully measured, risk-based regulatory regime," but he provided no details.

Congressional attempts at regulation have been led by Sen. Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), who for three years has called for a comprehensive system for companies to enhance security procedures and disclose information about their operations.

Corzine and Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), who chairs the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, are working on a compromise measure that would give the Department of Homeland Security the responsibility for securing chemical plants.

"The Congressional Research Service survey requested by Congressman Markey shows once again how important it is for the Congress and the administration to stop talking about the potential consequences of a terrorist assault on one of our chemical facilities and act to create tough, uniform security standards," said Corzine, New Jersey's Democratic gubernatorial candidate. "It's time we move on this issue."